DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 374 371 CG 025 648

AUTHOR Bakker, Richard
TITLE The Coach's Role in Alcohol/Drug Prevention.
INSTITUTION Rutgers, The State Univ., New Brunswick, N.J. Center of Alcohol Studies.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 4p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Alcohol Abuse; *Athletes; *Athletic Coaches; Competition; Coping; *Drug Education; Drug Use; *Health Education; Performance; Preadolescents; *Prevention; Secondary Education; Self Management; *Substance Abuse
IDENTIFIERS *Steroids

ABSTRACT

A 1989 National Youth Sports Coaches Association survey of about 1,200 youth aged 10-14 indicated that young athletes identify somewhat with their drug-using athlete models. Forty-three percent of respondents felt that steroids are not harmful if properly used, and 45% felt that steroids were likely to increase their athletic performance. Steroids can improve performance without immediate severe physical harm, and thus are attractive to athletes, who often suffer from anxiety connected with performance in their sport. Significant percentages said they knew where to obtain steroids and might use them to enhance performance; 42%, however, said they look to their coaches as role models and alcohol and drug educators. The influence of coaches on their players is known to be profound and long-lasting. Younger children are likely to be influenced even more than players at the high school and college level. It is important that coaches talk to their players about the deleterious effects of steroids. The coach also needs to explain that other drugs and alcohol do not offer escape from pressure, anxiety, or low self-esteem and, in fact, may lead to decreased performance. Effective use prevention can be based on knowledge and the development of appropriate attitudes and decision-making skills. (MSF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 374 371

The Coach's Role in Alcohol/Drug Prevention

by Richard Bakker

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. S. BATTLE

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG025648

New Jersey Alcohol / Drug
RESOURCE CENTER AND CLEARINGHOUSE
Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

THE COACH'S ROLE IN ALCOHOL/DRUG PREVENTION

Richard Bakker, Ed.D.

In the past few years, there have been numerous stories concerning drug or alcohol problems among athletes, ranging from the Ben Johnson incident at the 1988 Summer Olympics to the tragic case of former National Football League player Lyle Alzado, who developed brain cancer from his heavy use of anabolic steroids. The behavior of such role models seems to imply that to succeed in sports, one may need to cheat to reach the top. Steroid abuse is certainly not new nor is it the only drug problem among professional athletes: the lifetime bans of Michael Ray Richardson and Roy Tarpley from the National Basketball Association resulted from the use of alcohol and other drugs as an escape mechanism from the pressure and anxiety in high level sports and also from the pressures of everyday life.

The message that these athletes are sending to youth is frightening to adults. A survey conducted by the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) in 1989 demonstrated that young athletes identify somewhat with this drug-using behavior. Over 1,200 athletes between the ages of 10-14 were surveyed and the results showed that:

- 43% of the athletes felt that steroids would not harm an athlete if they were used carefully.
- 45% felt that steroid use was likely to improve their performance.
- 15% indicated they might use steroids to enhance their performance.
- 12% stated they knew where to obtain steroids.
- 4% noted that they had already been offered steroids.
- 2% were presently on steroids.

The findings of this study indicate a definite lack of knowledge about steroids and a perception that steroid use is something that can be controlled and is an integral part of athletic success. If the negative role models of our professional athletes are part of the problem, then

society needs to find positive role models to better influence young athletes. The results of the previously-mentioned NYSCA survey provide an answer: 42% of the respondents indicated that they would look to their coach as a role model and as an alcohol and drug educator.

Eitzen and Sage, in their book *Sociology of American Sport*, note that coaches exert a tremendous influence upon their players and are an important factor in helping to establish positive self-esteem in their athletes. In that same publication, Greenspan reinforced this concept when he noted that 6-12 years after a group of swimmers had stopped competing, they still rated their former coaches as the most significant adults in their lives. When we think of the influential role of a coach, we tend to look primarily at the high school and college level coach. However, as Eitzen points out, the younger the athlete, the more likely that values will be transferred. This indicates that the child at the youth sports league level will likely be more affected by the coach than will players at the high school or college level. This influence, and the indirect teaching that coaches perform through their behavior, can be utilized in a positive manner to educate players about the dangers of alcohol and other drug abuse. Youth sports coaches need to understand the important roles that they play. Presently 70-75% of children who begin organized sports at the age of seven drop out by the start of their teen years. Although a number of reasons contribute to this, the primary one seems to be that sports participation ceases to be fun and becomes fraught with anxiety. The coach is the most influential factor here; he or she needs to be taught how to make sports a positive experience, how to improve players' self-esteem, and how to replace pressure and anxiety with fun and confidence.

The willingness of many youth sports participants to consider steroids as a "quick fix" to achieve athletic success, although frightening, is not altogether surprising. In 1984, when members of the American Olympic Team were asked whether they would take a "magical solution" that would guarantee them a gold medal but would cause severe health problems within 2-3 years, a high percentage of them indicated that it would be worth the risk in order to win a medal. The fact that steroids can improve performance without immediate severe physical harm may, in fact, encourage athletes to take the risk. It is imperative, therefore, that coaches talk to their players in detail about the harmful effects of steroids, such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, effects on reproductive abilities, and uncontrollable emotional rages. The coach also needs to make it clear to his/her players that other drugs and alcohol are not escape mechanisms from pressure, anxiety, or low self-esteem. In fact, they can impair motor coordination, perception and

CG0256 48

judgement, leading to decreased, and often risky, athletic performance.

The most commonly abused drugs by athletes, besides steroids, are alcohol, cocaine and amphetamines. These drugs carry major risks of overdose, addiction, driving-while-impaired, and susceptibility to other accidents. Use of tobacco will impair breathing and endurance (if smoked) or will increase the risk of mouth and lip cancer, if chewed. Even heavy use of painkillers can be dangerous by alleviating or masking symptoms of serious injury.

Unfortunately, the risks of alcohol and other drug use are often down-played for athletes. Alcohol and tobacco companies frequently sponsor sporting events and also target young audiences in their advertising. Alcohol and other drug-related incidents among athletes may even be overlooked by coaches, teachers, or parents to avoid endangering a team's or athlete's success. However, such a response only increases the chances that young athletes will begin, or continue, to experiment with drug use.

Presently, society tends to equate the importance of coaches with the skill levels of their athletes; however, as Eitzen has pointed out, the younger the athlete, the more voluntarily he/she participates and the more influential the coach will be. It's extremely important, therefore, that youth coaches recognize the important roles that they play in preventing alcohol and other drug abuse and accept that responsibility. Effective prevention is based on knowledge as well as the development of appropriate attitudes and decision-making skills.

References

National Youth Sports Coaches Association. (1989). *Anabolic steroid survey.* Orlando, FL.

Eitzen, S., & Sage, G. H. (1989). *Sociology of american sport (4th ed.).* Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

Athletes and drugs: A no-win combination. (1986). Minneapolis, MN: Community Intervention.

Readings for Further Information

Coaches aware of students' alcohol use. (1991, December). *National Federation News,* p. 15.

Coakley, J. J. (1990). *Sport in society: Issues and controversies.* St. Louis, MO: C.V. Mosby.

Cole, L. (1989). *Never too young to die: The death of Len Bias.* New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Cowart, V.S. (1987). Alcohol and athletics don't mix: Can the players now learn to say nix? *Journal of the American Medical Association,* 258, 1571-1572.

Martens, Rainer (Ed.). (1978). *Joy and sadness in children's sports.* Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Seefeld, Vern (Ed.). (1987). *Handbook for youth sport coaches.* Reston, VA: National Association of Sport and Physical Education.

R. Tricker & D.L. Cook (Eds.). (1990). *Athletes at risk: Drugs and sport.* Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown.

Resources on Videotape

Downfall: Sports and drugs. (1988). Capitol Heights, MD: National Audiovisual Center.

The Little League drug education program. (1990). Columbia, MD: Romano & Associates.

Parents' guidelines for youth sports. (1988). Orlando, FL : National Youth Sports Coaches Association.

Player/coach relationships. (1988). Orlando, FL: National Youth Sports Association.

What price glory? (1990). New Brunswick, NJ: Sports Science Research.

Richard Bakker, Ed.D.
is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physical Education, Health, and Recreation at Kean College of New Jersey and the Executive Director of National Youth Sports Coaches Association of New Jersey.

The New Jersey Alcohol/Drug Resource Center and Clearinghouse serves institutions of higher education, state agencies, communities and school districts throughout the state of New Jersey by providing technical assistance, training , and resources in alcohol and other drug abuse education and prevention. For more information on the Clearinghouse, call or write to:

New Jersey Alcohol/Drug Resource Center & Clearinghouse
Center of Alcohol Studies
Smithers Hall-Busch Campus
Rutgers University
Piscataway, NJ 08855-0969
(908) 981 - 0964 FAX (908) 981-8076

©1992

RUTGERS

CLEARINGHOUSE FACT SHEETS MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY QUANTITY FOR EDUCATIONAL USE